

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Hedwig and the Angry Inch (\$24.98; New Line)/ Under the Sand (\$24.98; Fox Lorber)/ The Circle (\$24.98; Fox Lorber) 12/9/01

Do you think this was a terrible year for movies? Here are three that would deserve Top Ten list consideration in any year. John Cameron Mitchell triumphed completely with *Hedwig* — I didn't think the oddball musical would translate well to the screen, but if anything the movie is better than the show. The schticky humor is toned down, the songs are as brilliant as ever, Michael Pitt is a leather-panted bit of decadence as Tommy Gnosis and Mitchell (and his hair) reign supreme. Sensational. *Under the Sand* is its polar opposite, a quietly devastating film about a woman (Charlotte Rampling) who can't admit that her husband who drowned at the shore is actually gone for good. Director Francois Ozon is clearly a singular, exceptional talent. Finally, *The Circle* is an entertaining, pointed look at the life of women in Iran. It's a daisy chain of a story, letting the story of one woman lead into another and deftly showing the constricted world in which they must operate.



"The Score" delivers great acting from Edward Norton, left, and Robert De Niro, but the script is light-weight and has bizarre twists.

The Score (\$29.99; Paramount)

Here's another movie some people would argue for as one of the year's best. That's hard to argue with, since this amiable caper offers an acting class by Robert De Niro, Edward Norton (terrific as always) and Marlon Brando (who is truly obsessed with pigs and seems to work references to them into every movie he does). But argue I will Director Frank Oz is a favorite of mine, having done some terrific light comedy. But the script is a let-down that — without spoiling the ending — has some unbelievable twists that simply don't add up. (Why, oh why would De Niro have been carrying along a second bag weighted down with equipment just to pull a bait-and-switch if the need arose?) Fun, but not worth revisiting.

Rush Hour 2 (\$26.98; New Line)

What took them so long? Sure, this sequel to the amiable buddy film starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker is set mostly in Hong Kong instead of the U.S. But for better and worse, it is virtually the same film done over again, complete with some clever stunting from Chan, some clever lip from Tucker and a bad guy that can be chop-sockeyed. Harmless, but for this we waited three years? In the good old days of the powerful studios, this sucker would have been out about six months after the original caught fire. But if that had happened, Tucker would never have had his payday. So he should thank his lucky stars New Line dragged its feet. Sock that money away, Tucker! You'll be lucky to get a vehicle this decent again.

Medium Cool (\$29.99; Paramount)

It's a shame to look at a classic and think only about missed opportunities. But this 1969 movie marked a high water mark for Haskell Wexler — one of the great cinematographers, but here serving as writer and director. If he'd pursued such a career more avidly, we would have enjoyed distinctive films like this one, the story of a TV news cameraman (Robert Forster) swept up in the '68 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. But how many other classic films for which he served as dp — such as *Bound for Glory*, *Matewan*, and the stunning *Days of Heaven* — might have been lesser efforts without him? Equally frustrating is the career of Forster, who had to wait almost 30 years for another good role, courtesy of Quentin Tarantino and *Jackie Brown*.

The Elephant Man (\$29.99; Paramount)

I'll never know what prompted Mel Brooks to choose David Lynch to adapt this haunting play about a disfigured man, named John Merrick (John Hurt), who is rescued from a freak show by a distinguished surgeon (Anthony Hopkins) and given dignity of a sort. But what an inspired choice Lynch was — the movie is memorable and beautifully shot in black and white. Billy Crudup will bring the drama to Broadway next year, so here's a chance to brush up on a gem.

— Michael Giltz